



OFFICE OF RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Marc Elrich
County Executive

Tiffany Ward
Director and Chief Equity Officer

MEMORANDUM

March 20, 2023

To: Jennifer Bryant, Director
Office of Management and Budget

From: Tiffany Ward, Director
Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice 

Re: Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) Supplemental Appropriation (SA) #23-72
North Bethesda Metro Station Area Redevelopment

- I. **FINDING:** The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) is unable to determine the extent to which Supplemental Appropriation #23-72 North Bethesda Metro Station Area Redevelopment Infrastructure is likely to reduce economic disparities and inequities or inequities in transit access. While some data on racial disparities and inequities in transportation are available, it's unclear how these data—and engagement of riders, pedestrians, and cyclists—were used in the formulation of proposed infrastructure improvements
- II. **BACKGROUND:** The purpose of Supplemental Appropriation #23-72 North Bethesda Metro Station Area Redevelopment Infrastructure is to allocate funding from a Maryland State Grant to support multi-modal access to the metro station by improving bicycle and pedestrian access immediately adjacent to the metro station. The funding will enable the design of street improvements to accommodate pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure along Old Georgetown Road between Grand Park Avenue and Rockville Pike and make bicycle improvements along Marinelli Drive from Executive Boulevard to Rockville Pike. The funding is also requested for wayfinding signage and placemaking design.

There are several methods for assessing the extent to which Capital Improvements Programs (CIP) and individual projects advance racial equity and social justice. In Montgomery County, the Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORES) developed a

Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) Supplemental Appropriation (SA) 23-72 North
Bethesda Metro Station Area of Redevelopment

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CIP Budget Equity Tool (BET) and Guidance Manual to help stakeholders incorporate a racial equity lens into project development and resource decisions. Best practices for using a racial equity tool, such as the CIP BET, suggest that the tool should be used early and often in project development and involve a diverse set of project stakeholders, including community members.

While initial funding for this project was requested for FY23 – requiring a racial equity analysis during the CIP review process (as it occurred after the passage of the RESJ Act) – ORESJ did not receive a complete CIP BET for this project. This may be related to when the project was initially *conceived* (prior to the passage of the RESJ Act), as efforts to redevelop White Flint North Bethesda (including areas around the Metro Station) have been in various phases of planning and implementation since the 2010 White Flint Master Plan and as recently as in the March 2022 Pike District Placemaking Report¹. These activities are a part of the County’s larger effort to transform the White Flint North Bethesda area into a national epicenter of computationally enabled life sciences research².

Available information indicates that “the County plans to convene multiple stakeholders including community groups and developers to seek their input on what specific projects among the many the Planning Board and consultants identified above would be expected to spur the most immediate benefit in expediting redevelopment”. At the time of this analysis however, it was unclear to what extent this took place prior to receipt of State Aid or in the formulation of this supplemental appropriation request. Therefore, a key input in applying a racial equity lens—community engagement—is also missing.

ORESJ has previously written about many of the structural factors, including current day economic development policies and practices, that have created or exacerbated economic racial disparities and inequities. While this supplemental appropriation does not fund specific economic development activities, the goal of this infrastructure improvement project is to facilitate economic development. As such, we encourage review of the below REIAs:

- REIA of Supplemental Appropriation #22-59 Life Sciences and Technology Centers <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/22-59.pdf>
- REIA of Supplemental Appropriation #23-10 IgnITe Hub <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/23-10.pdf>
- REIA of Supplemental Appropriation #23-49 Institute for Intelligent and Immersive Computing for Life Science and Medicine <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/23-49.pdf>

¹ https://ctycms.com/md-pike-district/docs/pd_placemakingreport_march-2021.pdf

² https://montgomerycountymd.gov/OMB/Resources/Files/omb/pdfs/fy23/cipamend2/CIPAMEND_ALL_APR18_FINAL.pdf

Given that this supplemental appropriation is focused on funding infrastructure related to a broader economic development plan, in this context, there are limited opportunities to identify project changes that may support the reduction of economic racial disparities and inequities. Therefore, within the scope of this REIA, opportunities for using the CIP BET to assess and address concerns related to the project's racial equity impacts are limited. This is particularly true given that some of the most significant impacts of this project are related to different types of economic activity enabled by the construction of pedestrian and bikeway infrastructure. While there may be limited opportunities to identify project changes that may support the reduction of racial disparities and inequities within the project – as these were not considered during the design – using ORESJ's CIP BET as a framework, we offer several observations for consideration:

What racial disparities or inequities in Montgomery County does this project seek to reduce or eliminate?

In general, this project seeks to enable greater pedestrian and commuter connectivity within and around North Bethesda Metro Station, as a means of spurring economic activity in the area. While all county residents and visitors could benefit from better access to North Bethesda Metro Station via bicycle or walking, it's unclear if there are any demographic groups that are likely to benefit more. For example, the data is clear that people of color, low-income residents, and other marginalized groups experience transit inequities at higher rates than other groups. As the Transit Center describes: “pervasive racism and discrimination in land use, transportation, and transit planning have created wide gaps in transit access across race, income, and other characteristics, exacerbating social inequity”³. These inequities are so harmful because they are the exact barriers that prevent public transportation from being a “ladder of opportunity”⁴.

In Montgomery County, for example, overall, 8% of households don't have access to a car, while 14% of Black households and 12% of Mixed and Other households don't have access to a car⁵. Similarly, the average commute time to work among Black residents is 3 minutes longer than any other group⁶. Similar differences exist in terms of utilizing public transportation to work. Black residents were about 1.5 times as likely as White residents to take public transportation to work. These data points are also echoed in Ride On On-Board survey results, where 36% of riders were Black and 18% were Hispanic⁷. At the time of this analysis, specific public transportation utilization rates in and around the North Bethesda Metro Station area were not readily available.

³ <https://dashboard.transitcenter.org/>

⁴ <https://dashboard.transitcenter.org/>

⁵ https://nationalequityatlas.org/indicators/Car_access?geo=0400000000024031

⁶ https://nationalequityatlas.org/indicators/Commute_time?geo=0400000000024031

⁷ Table 3. https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DOT-Transit/Resources/Files/Title%20VI%20Plan%202020-2023%20Montgomery%20County%20FINAL%2012_08_20_posting.pdf

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In addition to utilization of public transportation, infrastructure improvements described in the supplemental appropriation are also designed to support pedestrian and bicycle access and safety. According to the County's Vision Zero maps and data from 2011-2015, the pedestrian fatality rates was highest among Hispanic residents (2.9 per 100,000 residents), followed by Black residents (1.6 per 100,000 residents), and White residents (.9 per 100,000 residents)⁸. Between 2012 and 2016, there were 87 severe and fatal collisions between motor vehicles and cyclists⁹—the data was not disaggregated by race or other relevant demographic characteristics, which is essential in identifying any inequities and providing targeted safety interventions. In addition to a lack of disaggregated data on this metric, there appears to be a general absence of data on disability and age within the data accessed for this REIA. The Urban Institute's *Advancing Racial Equity through Federally Funded Public Transit, Bicycle, and Pedestrian Projects A Data Guide for Local Applicants* explains the importance disaggregating data within this context: "A lack of disaggregated data on race, sex, disability status, and other key demographics creates knowledge gaps on the types of challenges and scales of need experienced across different constituencies, and in turn, impairs policymakers' ability to craft tailored, evidence-based programs"¹⁰.

How does this project address the racial disparities and inequities you described?

It's unclear based on available information whether analysis of data related to transit inequities linked to car access, public transportation utilization, or Vision Zero were considered in the preparation of this supplemental appropriation. ORESJ can't determine, therefore, how this particular supplemental appropriation fits into any plans or policies that aim to address transit inequities and simultaneously spur equitable economic development.

Does this project (including its development, construction, or implementation) have the potential to create any unintended consequences?

It's unclear based on available information how the planning and implementation of infrastructure improvements around the North Bethesda Metro Station may disrupt traffic, commuter activity, or otherwise burden individuals who navigate this area. Mitigation strategies may be in place but were not readily available at the time of this analysis.

cc:

Ken Hartman, Director, Strategic Partnerships, Office of the County Executive

⁸ <https://mcgov-gis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=60410e6f22844d2cbbe619505cb6e7bb>

⁹ <https://mcgov-gis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=60410e6f22844d2cbbe619505cb6e7bb>

¹⁰ [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2022-](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/Advancing%20Racial%20Equity%20through%20Federally%20Funded%20Public%20Transit%2C%20Bicycle%2C%20and%20Pedestrian%20Projects.pdf)

[09/Advancing%20Racial%20Equity%20through%20Federally%20Funded%20Public%20Transit%2C%20Bicycle%2C%20and%20Pedestrian%20Projects.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/Advancing%20Racial%20Equity%20through%20Federally%20Funded%20Public%20Transit%2C%20Bicycle%2C%20and%20Pedestrian%20Projects.pdf) Pg 20